



SUCCESS STORY

WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS: Muslim Women Entrepreneurs break new ground



As chair of the Council for Women Business Owners and Entrepreneurs and trustee of the Muslim Kutawato Chamber of Commerce based in Cotabato City, Bai Sandra Basar is in the fore-front of efforts to encourage and develop Muslim women entrepreneurs.

Muslim women entrepreneurs are now focused on improving the productivity and competitiveness of their enterprises which could motivate a wide range of peace and development initiatives in the Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

Bai Sandra Basar, chair of the Council for Women Business Owners and Entrepreneurs confirms this trend. "Muslim women are optimistic enough about their economic future to start their own businesses," she says.

The Council now has 25 members, a five-fold increase since its founding in 2002. Anchored in the program of the Muslim Kutawato Chamber of Commerce and Industry where 39% of the members are Muslim women entrepreneurs or cooperatives headed by women, the Council aims to help make

Muslim women fulfill their role as a true partner in development. Among the women business leaders are several former Moro National Liberation Front members. They are engaged in various industries including hardware and construction, textiles, food, handicraft, services, lending and agriculture.

The Albarakkah Restaurant and Catering Services, which started as a home-based business that produces native Muslim delicacies like rice roll locally known as tinagtag, dudol or rice jam, putlimandi which are cookies flavored with nuts, fermented fish, and shredded fish now employs 15 regular workers. It was a recipient of technology assistance from the Department of Science and Technology's (DOST) where she received grinders, packaging technologies, and cabinets.

"The Council serves as my support system. Its like all those years of hard labor are starting to bear fruit, ours has not been an easy fight but I'm happy that Muslim women are now getting the support and encouragement one needs in the industry," Bai Mina Datukan, manager of Albarakkah explains. Since 1987, various assistance have taken her and her products to local and national trade fairs such as the Center for International Trade Expositions and Missions (CITEM) in Manila and the Wow Philippines last year.

USAID's Growth with Equity in Mindanao (GEM) Program is assisting Muslim women entrepreneurs to compete in the traditionally male-dominated business sectors in the ARMM. Through GEM-supported business support organizations (BSOs), Muslim businesswomen have gained access to markets, enhanced their entrepreneurial capacity, formed business linkages through participation in various trade fairs, and capitalized on information about successful business and marketing trends.

The success of these women-owned businesses has encouraged expansion of existing businesses as well as new business formation. Now, these enterprising women have the opportunity to corner a significant share of the Muslim market in the region. Their ventures have provided direct employment to some 500 workers in Central Mindanao.

"If this growth is sustained, it will open doors to better employment and livelihood providing us the opportunity to control our destiny and gain economic independence," Basar confidently declares.